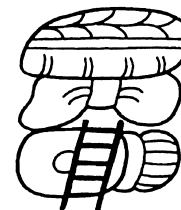


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A Possible Alternative Way of Expressing Month Names in Maya Writing

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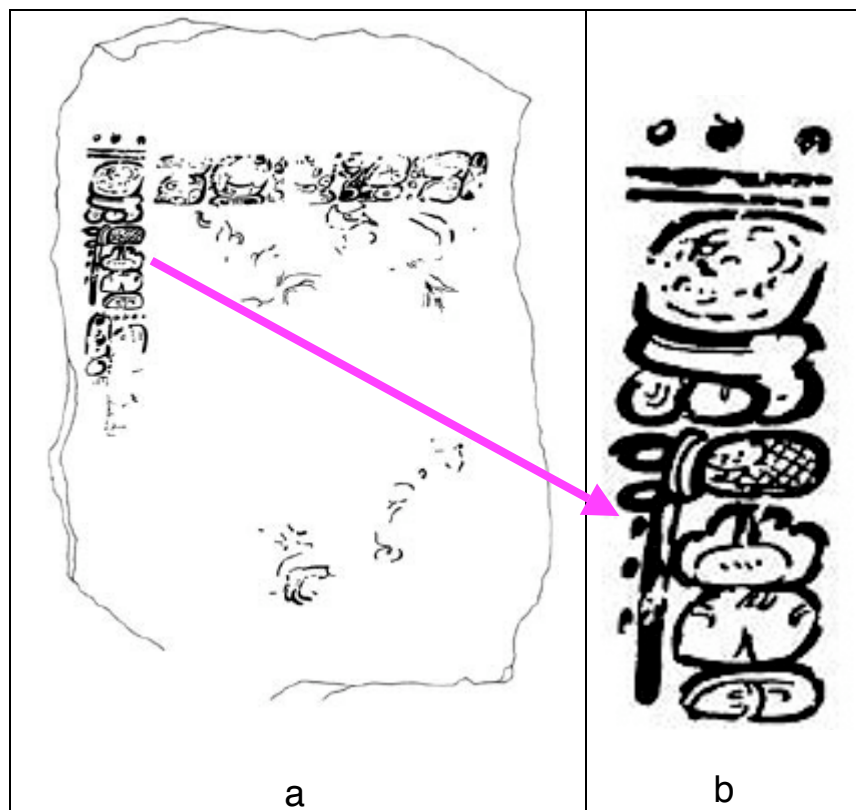


Figure 1. Ek' Balam Vault Cover 18.

Drawing by Alfonso Lacadena García-Gallo (Lacadena 2002)

This short note raises the possibility that Maya scribes may have had an alternative way of expressing month counts using an ordinal sequence of 'months' rather than the typical sequence of month names. The evidence for this suggestion comes from a single example, but the possibility should nevertheless be entertained seriously, given the parallel Tzeltalan evidence cited below. The example is found on Ek' B'alam Vault Cover 18 (Fig. 1a).

Lacadena (2002) reads the calendar round shown in Fig. 1b as follows: XI CHUWEN tu [IX] YAX WINIK-ki for 11 Chuwen, tu['] 9 Ya'ax winik '(On) 11 Chuwen, on the ninth of the month Ya'ax'. Lacadena dates this to 9.18.3.15.11. However, it is possible to read the second part, the one pertaining to the month count, differently. The YAX glyph could be referring here to *yäx* 'first', and thus it could be modifying *winik(-il)* 'month', rendering *yäx winik(-il)* 'first month'. This could be a conventional alternative way of referring to the first month, Pop. If so, what is being expressed could be in essence 9 Pop. Taking the time span for the Ek' Balam vaults (CE 775–841) as a rough time frame, 11 Chuwen 9 Pop would then result in the following possible set of dates:

Table 1.

09.16.14.17.11	CE 766
09.19.07.12.11	CE 818
10.02.00.07.11	CE 870

This is only a possibility, but one that makes sense in light of the Tzotzil names for the first four months (Thompson 1960[1950]:106; Fox and Justeson 1984:43): <Hum Uinicil> 'first month', <Xchibal Uinicil> 'second month', <Yoxchibal Uinicil> 'third month', and <Xcahnibal Uinicil> 'fourth month'. It is therefore possible that *yäx winik(-il)* could, in fact, be 'first month'.

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